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Design and Social Innovation Research Network: Bridging the UK and Asia-Pacific Practices

desiap.org

Contents

1. Executive Summary	1
2. Context	10
3. DESIAP Research Network	15
4. Outputs	44
5. Towards creating an ecosystem of learning and research in Design and Social Innovation	48
6. References	54

1

Executive Summary

Design and Social Innovation in Asia-Pacific (DESIAP) is a learning platform, a community of practice and a network for collaboration and ongoing knowledge sharing for various practitioners, researchers, communities, and professionals working in the Social Innovation space in the UK and the Asia-Pacific region.

As the Asia-Pacific region emerges as a global economic leader, even prosperous economies are facing challenges of balancing economic development with social and cultural sustainability. Social innovation—ideas, activities or services that work towards meeting social goals—is perceived to be able to address these issues. In this context, design is seen as a means of harnessing latent creativity and participation from stakeholders' local, situated and embodied knowledge, increasing the effectiveness of social innovation impact (Meroni & Sangiorgi, 2011). Mirroring the interest in this practice, Design and Social Innovation has become a growing and developing area of academic study (Irwin, 2015). However, as expected the majority of academic literature and cases studies are predominately focussed on Europe and the US.

When cities in Asia develop economically, design inevitably accompanies this growth. This is creating a trend of design being 'imported' through international consultancies like IDEO, Frog, Fjord and Deloitte that have opened up regional offices in response to this demand and rapid development. Observing this, we are concerned that this trend can inadvertently obscure or replace cultural, traditional and heterogeneous practices with imported beliefs that replicate narratives of industrialized progress or reproduce similar failings as current development efforts (Manzini, Baek & Baek, 2010).

The DESIAP platform aims to bring Design and Social Innovation into international and comparative focus, leveraging the experience and knowledge of leading researchers in the UK and Asia-Pacific to enrich and broaden its understanding, and to amplify the importance of exchanging ideas through global flows in various directions.

DESIAP platform was initiated by Yoko Akama, RMIT University (Australia) and Joyce Yee, Northumbria University (UK) in 2015, heralded by *From Things to Services* symposium and workshop in Singapore. This event attracted an international audience of over 150 academics, policy makers and practitioners across its two days, signalling a strong interest and opportunity for Design and Social Innovation in the region.

Following this success, in 2016 we received a one-year Research Network fund from the Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC) in the UK to bring together UK and Asia-Pacific researchers. With this funding, the DESIAP Research Network was created, and has since facilitated a symposium and a series of workshops in Thailand, Cambodia, Myanmar and the UK. Outcomes of these events have been compiled in this report and made publicly accessible on the DESIAP website.

Aims and Objectives of the DESIAP Research Network

- Create and maintain an international research network on Design and Social Innovation between UK and Asia-Pacific researchers and practitioners.
- Make visible the current examples of Design and Social Innovation in Asia-Pacific.
- Share learnings and case studies from Asia-Pacific with UK researchers.
- Generate a working framework of terminologies, methodologies and theory of Design and Social Innovation through case study and literature analysis.
- Identify opportunities to inform potential PhD studies, research collaborations and capacity building in teaching, research and practice.
- Build through the research network productive relationships and critical mass in Design and Social Innovation for professionals, government, organisations, funding councils and academics, particularly in the Asia-Pacific.
- Build a community of practice and facilitate on-going engagement among a geographically dispersed community.

Who is this report for?

This report is written for the following audience:

- Participants of DESIAP events who contributed to the activities delivered through the project;
- Researchers and practitioners working in and across Design and Social Innovation related areas;
- Communities of practice (e.g. social innovators and social entrepreneurs) interested in understanding the challenges and opportunities in the Design and Social Innovation landscape in Asia-Pacific;
- Government-supported design and innovation bodies and funding agencies involved in Design and Social Innovation practice and research;
- Policy makers and local government commissioners new to Design and Social Innovation.

Key activities during 2016 – 2017

DESIAP facilitated four key activities in Thailand, the UK, Cambodia, and Myanmar to bring together a dispersed community of practice and inform further collaborative practice and research opportunities.



- **Event 1 – DESIAP Research Network Public Symposium, 12th July 2016, Thailand Creative and Design Center:** This event presented a variety of Design and Social Innovation initiatives from Australia, Cambodia, China, Japan, Myanmar, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand and the UK to the public in Bangkok.
- **Event 2 – Bangkok Workshop, 13-14th July 2016:** This 2-day workshop followed on from the public symposium to identify issues, themes and opportunities for further research.
- **Event 3 – UK Workshop, 8-9th November 2016:** The outcomes from the Bangkok symposium and workshop were shared as points of discussion with participants in the UK and shaped a practitioner workshop that further identified and informed practice and research opportunities in the UK and Asia-Pacific.
- **Event 4 – Cambodia and Myanmar Workshops, 25-26th April 2017:** Project visits and workshops in Phnom Penh and Yangon brought together local change-makers to inform them about DESIAP Research Network and explored a number of locally-relevant challenges and opportunities for Design and Social Innovation.

Outcomes

The following outcomes have been produced from the DESIAP Research Network activities:

- **Establishment of a network of Design and Social Innovation practitioners and researchers in Asia-Pacific and the UK.**
The network brought together influential and experienced practitioners and researchers of Design and Social Innovation to connect, share practices and identify project opportunities. For UK based practitioners looking to find opportunities to engage with projects and people in Asia-Pacific, the case studies and findings from the network activities have helped with ways to consider issues, approaches and mindsets that are significant. For Asia-Pacific practitioners, participation in the public symposium and workshop has enabled them to hear stories of successes and failures from the region, and place their work alongside UK case studies. Attendance at the events also offered opportunities to connect among incubators, NGOs, think tanks, innovation hubs, social entrepreneurs, social venture funds and governmental departments.
- **Creating opportunities for further collaboration and research.**
We have collaborated on four funding bids with new and existing network members to focus on building capacity in Design and Social Innovation. These include:
 - 1 Enabling Capabilities Platform in Design and Creative Practice, RMIT University (\$16,000 AUD) in 2017 [funded]
 - 2 Australia-ASEAN Council Grant, Department of Foreign and Trade (DFAT) Australia government, (\$50,000 AUD) 2017-2018 [unfunded]
 - 3 Toyota Foundation International Grant, Japan (\$120,000AUD) 2017-2019 [unfunded]
 - 4 Global Challenge Research Fund, Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) over three years during 2017-2020 (£1.9 mil) [we were one of the 12 projects that were invited to attend the final interview but did not succeed in being the final 5 projects that was eventually funded]



- **Generating understanding of what 'design' could mean in social innovation.**

The network activities helped identify emerging and existing Design and Social Innovation practices from Asia-Pacific, specifically from Australia, Cambodia, China, Japan, Myanmar, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, and also the UK. Presentations at the public symposium in Bangkok illustrated ways in which public institutions like governments, universities and NGOs operate as key partners to fund, collaborate, educate and enable initiatives to seed, grow and prosper. In this arena, design was acknowledged as a valuable skill and approach in making intangible phenomena more tangible and fostering spaces to collaborate and engage with broader social issues.

Various strategies, both intentional and serendipitous, were also shared through examples that helped to foster trust, collaboration and relationships in order to bridge boundaries and connect to human, social, cultural and economic resources. These were expressed as paramount to disrupting hierarchies, boundaries and social norms, and to bring people along in transitioning to alternative ways to live, work, study and play. However, other human dimensions such as empathy, generosity, patience, humility, curiosity and openness were also seen as valuable when engaging in social change.

We also observed how Design and Social Innovation is a practice that foregrounds different dimensions. We began constructing a framework (see page 43) to start this conversation, gleaned from the workshops and discussions so far, and it is still being developed. 'Design' in this context is closer to the notions of 'everyday design' (Wakkary et al 2015). It is not only undertaken by professional or self-identifying designers, but rather every day people who are appropriating and modifying accessible things for a social purpose. Design here is named and has been practiced in 'other ways' for centuries, shaped by various needs, materials, histories

and philosophies (Salazar and Botero 2017; Akama et al. forthcoming) and we attempted to start with this premise.

- **A growing database of Design and Social Innovation practices in Asia-Pacific.**

DESIAP events offered an international platform for the Asia-Pacific speakers to showcase their work and to extend their reach beyond their locality. This aimed to strengthen their standing in their community and demonstrate value they could bring to future bids and collaborations. The additional resources published on the DESIAP website also provide a range of varied examples in different countries, offering inspiration and connection to other practitioners and provide a way to track project notices in the future. Various materials, including the presentations from DESIAP events have been made available to the wider community through the website, facebook page, and vimeo. The website is starting to become a key go-to resource for information on past, present, and future network activity, and functions as both the central meeting point for facilitating ongoing engagement and collaboration between DESIAP's geographically dispersed community of practice and as an archive for critical reflection.

- **A framework of five themes for further research.**

Emerging from the presentations, discussions, and workshop at DESIAP Bangkok 2016 and further refined during the Northumbria workshop, the following themes have provided useful footholds with which to cohere our observations and insights:

- 1 Cultural Nuance
- 2 Relationship
- 3 Risk, precariousness and uncertainty
- 4 Temporality
- 5 Impact



Examples of Design and Social Innovation

We briefly introduce a variety of initiatives that can be considered as Design and Social Innovation, even if this term is not specifically used by these organisations. This is because design and innovation here, ranging from technology, services and human-centred approaches, are enabling social impact by involving the very people who are impacted by complex issues. This also means that what may appear as mere technological build and application in an industrialized nation can be seen as social innovation in another developing country, for example, precision farming technology provided by Proximity Designs in Myanmar to alleviate poverty among farmers and assist their decision-making processes (Kim, Harimoto and Baek, forthcoming).



Proximity Designs, Myanmar

Proximity is a social enterprise that designs, makes and delivers affordable, income-boosting products and services that complement the entrepreneurial spirit of rural families. They focus on irrigation technology, agricultural knowledge and financial services for small farmers that help open up new economic opportunities. This empowering technology are designed, prototyped and undergo a rigorous user-testing with farmers in order to enable agricultural productivity. Likewise, financial services are designed for smallholder farmers to enable access to affordable credit to increase yield and enable them to practice sustainable farming methods. Community input and understanding shapes this process.

'Using human-centred design is quite different from the traditional aid model.... we design products and services to help people living in extreme poverty. They include foot pumps, drip irrigation, water storage containers ... to improve their lives on a daily basis ... in order to do that, we have to look for ways to spend a lot of time with them, to observe them and see how they live, and be able to just have in-depth conversations with them ... its about having a close relationship with people you're trying to help. ... it's a two-way relationship, and it's not happening from far away from another country's head quarters ... you're designing for people you're intimate with.'

Debbie-Aung Din Taylor, Co-director of Proximity Design, Myanmar

proximitydesigns.org



InSTEDD iLab, Cambodia

The InSTEDD iLab team is building technological capacity to address health, safety and sustainable development issues in the Mekong Basin. Their approach is design-oriented and participatory to co-create tools with the community in order to foster a culture of innovation, specifically around localized health issues. It was established in 2008 to bring together the social and technical sectors of humanitarian and development aid. They engage in innovation and research promoting collaborative technologies to build local capacity while developing technological skills to ensure that systems created are relevant for the greatest number of people. This is of significant value in Cambodia, which has undergone incredible economic change since the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime in the early 1980s. Their projects have information sharing, education and learning at their core, and often involve working with diverse community skills and literacy levels. Increased use of mobile phone coverage across even the most rural areas of Southeast Asia has enabled greater possibilities with respect to inclusive education. They have also developed training programmes for young people in how to code for mobile phone development. This provides the critical skills necessary for designing and developing platforms that can achieve social aims.

'It's about human-centred design of InSTEDD. It guides you from the beginning to the end of development so that means when you try to develop software, you make a field visit to see how people are working, and what is the real problem that you're going to figure out.'

Sokmesa Khiev, Senior Software Developer, InSTEDD's iLab SEA

www.ilabsoutheastasia.org

Learn Education, Thailand

One of the biggest problems facing Thai education is student drop-out rates, halting their education short and cutting access to important life opportunities. While primary and tertiary education is now free in Thailand, young people in rural areas who need to work to sustain precarious family incomes do not benefit. The implication is that addressing short-term financial constraints, such as free school places and affordable loans for college, is not enough to eliminate inequalities in education and that other interventions must be made much earlier. Drop-out rates, although not too high overall, remain an issue in particular. By identifying leverage points in Thai education, Learn Education believes that technology with the appropriate learning content, supportive software and, most importantly, the right implementation process, can improve learning and teaching experiences for all. Learn Education is a social enterprise focusing on innovation through learning platforms by leveraging technology-based learning tools with digital content to help teachers provide quality education. Their ethos is to equip students with the skills to become critical thinkers, which has further increased motivation and engagement in learning and higher academic performance in Thailand.

They have a multi-disciplinary team consisting of educators, psychologist, data scientists, researchers, engineers and film makers. They are also very clear about offering platforms and solutions that are closely integrated with the existing structure, curriculum and resources of the schools. They work closely with the students, teachers, parents and principals in order to develop solution that takes into account the various different challenges and social context of student learning. In Learn Education's case, it's really important to develop a relationship based on trust and authenticity within the students' learning circle and really identify what they value. This then enables them to develop and test a blended learning solution that presents teachers (and not technology) at the core of learning.



'We're designing learning solutions for students and teachers together'

Viria Vichit-Vadakan, Director of New Business Development, Learn Education
(<https://vimeo.com/album/4217650/video/188829968>)

www.learneducation.co.th

2

Context

2.1

What is Design and Social Innovation?

Communities and organisations have always tackled problems and effected change for the social and public good (Harris & Albury, 2009). The term 'Social Innovation' has become widely used, being actively promoted by academia, government and industry alike. In the last ten years, design has become increasingly viewed as an enabler of social innovation. According to the *Design for Social Innovation Report* published by the European Commission (2014, p2), they explain "social innovation is the concept of developing new – often disruptive solutions that work towards meeting social goals."

Design is seen as a means of harnessing latent creativity and participation from stakeholders' local, situated and embodied knowledge (Meroni & Sangiorgi, 2011). The report argues that the use of Design and Social Innovation increases the effectiveness of its impact, creating in turn new growth prospects and market opportunity. The turn to design is also prompted by a growing recognition that one-size-fits-all, government-driven approaches to policy delivery are inadequate, because it fails to recognise the

diverse character and needs of communities (Burns et al, 2006). The on-going financial crisis in the UK, Europe and the US has increased adoption of design-led approaches (see Armstrong et al, 2014; Sangiorgi, Prendiville & Ricketts, 2014). The emergence of social innovation labs in Australia, Hong Kong, Singapore, Japan and Korea are strong signs that this interest is emerging in Asia-Pacific.

The AHRC's *Social Design Futures* report found that although the UK has a strong social design practice, there are systematic weaknesses in the research landscape (Armstrong et al, 2014). Research agendas are often driven by non-academic concerns that run contrary to knowledge generation imperatives. Arguably, the very same point could be made about the field of Design and Social Innovation. Hence, the DESIAP platform aims to bring Design and Social Innovation into international and comparative focus, leveraging the experience and knowledge of leading researchers in the UK and Asia-Pacific to enrich and broaden its understanding.

2.2

Why Design and Social Innovation?

Many developing regions within Southeast Asia have growing economies. At the same time, communities within these countries are facing significant challenges to balance this growth with issues such as social, cultural and environmental sustainability, equitable distribution of wealth, support for human-rights and equal access to education. Current models of international development can be problematic in that contracts do not always directly contribute to local economies sustainably (Kenny, 2013). Such models tend to assume that transfer and standards are unidirectional from the global north to the global south (Rist, 1990; Young, 2003) and fail to consider the complexity and diversity of individuals, aspirations, experiences, capacities and circumstances (Escobar, 2011). Social innovation, characterised by ideas, activities or services that work towards meeting social goals, is perceived to be able to overcome barriers, such as climate change or ageing, and fill the gap of what governments, private organisations and NGOs can offer and what people need (Mulgan, 2007). Here, new frameworks of action underscore the importance of local stakeholders (Lucci, 2015), citizen participation and co-creation, culture, and new roles for government and business as drivers of sustainability (Brinkerhoff, 2008; Moore, 2015).

Currently, two perspectives on social innovation dominate academic discourse. The individualist perspective views social innovation as a result of the action of certain visionary individuals (Bacq & Janssen, 2011) interacting with and transforming their social context, while promoting social change (Cajaiba-Santana, 2014). While the structural perspective views other forces such as market, technology and social factors driving innovation (Howaldt & Schwarz, 2010; Hämäläinen, 2007).

In the last decade there has been increasing interest in Design and Social Innovation (Hillgren, Seravelli & Emilson, 2011; Mulgan, 2014). Methods such as visualisation, prototyping, participatory design and strategic design are perceived to contribute in a positive manner to the social innovation process (Brown & Wyatt, 2010; Murray, Caulier-Grice & Mulgan, 2010). The origin of this field of study is commonly attributed to the writings of Papanek (1971; 1985) who emphasised the importance of designers' social and moral responsibility towards their audience, addressing people's needs rather than their (artificially created) wants. Along with its popularity in practice, the number of academic publications on Design and Social Innovation have increased steadily in the past years.





2.3 Design in the Periphery

Reflected in the term, 'The Asian 21st Century' by economists and political journalists, developing economies in Asia are projected to outpace developed economies in Europe in this century. The ASEAN-5's (Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam) GDP growth far outstrips that of the Euro zone (AUSTRADE 2015). Australia is entering its 24th year of uninterrupted economic growth, with GDP projection higher than that for the US, UK and Europe. This shifting economic climate is a significant factor in the growing attention towards the Asia-Pacific region as an emerging global leader. However, prosperous economies like Australia, Japan, Singapore and Hong Kong are facing challenges of balancing economic development with social and cultural sustainability.

Against this backdrop, the emergence and popularity of Design and Social Innovation labs (e.g. DESIS international network) and research projects (e.g. European Funded SEASIN Southeast Asian Social Innovation Network) illustrates a strong willingness and capacity to generate a different model of development using design

to drive innovation. Cities like Singapore, Tokyo and Hong Kong are readily 'importing' design from the 'west' through design innovation consultancies like IDEO, Frog, Fjord and Deloitte who offer design thinking and methods to solve economic and social problems. Following such apex economies in Asia, lower income countries (such as Myanmar and Cambodia), are signalling an interest and desire to adopt design innovation to deliver solutions that can help bring 'order' and transparent 'process' to development efforts (Akama & Yee, 2016). Similarly, middle-income developing countries (like Thailand and Malaysia) are turning to D&SI approaches to address post-industrial and post-globalisation issues of growing income divides and social and political freedom. While recognising the contribution design can make, this trend towards global models of design for social innovation can inadvertently obscure or replace cultural, traditional and heterogeneous practices with imported beliefs seeking to replicate narratives of industrialized progress or indeed reproduce similar failings as current development efforts (Bala-Miller, 2008).

2.4

Design looking West

Studies in Design and Social Innovation is still developing (Irwin, 2015) and is paired with a number of significant issues that need to be addressed in order for the field to mature. One such issue includes the dominance of academic literature narrowly focused on Europe (Hillgren, Seravelli & Emilson 2011; Jégou & Manzini, 2008; Manzini, 2015; Morelli, 2007; Meroni, Fassi & Simeone, 2013) or the US (Brown & Wyatt, 2010; DiSalvo et al, 2011; Westley et al, 2012). Many literatures also lack critical analysis of how design contributes to social innovation practice (Komatsu et al, 2016; Mulgan, 2014).

When academic discourses in Design and Social Innovation are dominated by case studies in Europe and the US, it can inadvertently create a trend for seeking expertise, replicable methods and best-practices of their models, establishing an unspoken hierarchy and dominant paradigms of design. Theory, practice and discipline of design evolved through industrialisation, modernism and the Bauhaus, all of which originates from and is centred in Europe. Bousbaci's (2008) comprehensive article explains that design theory assumes particular 'model of the designer' that shapes design discourse through the late 20th century. His search for an underlying philosophy of design traverses through works by key scholars such as Christopher Alexander, Richard Buchanan, Nigel Cross, Bryan Lawson, Allan Newell, Horst Rittel, Herbert Simon, Melvin Webber, to illustrate shifts from Cartesian thinking in the first generation of design

methods, through thrusts towards planning methodologies at Ulm and the emphasis of 'wicked problem' in second and third generations. His discussion reveals a consistent dominance of rational approaches in relating 'problems' and 'solutions', before 'post rationalist' models began to emerge around the 1980's, following Donald Schön's theory of reflective practice and the influence of feminism and anthropology in design.

When we note the names who fundamentally shaped the thinking in design, it starts to indicate circular patterns of theory proposed by a handful of people largely concentrated in Europe and US whose ideas are continually cited to perpetuate its authority and privilege. This reflects the broader phenomenon of the visibility of men and the invisibility of women and ethnicities in design, both in industry and academic texts (see Akama & Barnes, 2009; Buckley, 1986; Thompson, 1994). Feminist and post-colonial theory exposes the mechanics of established canons and occupied theories where the dominant is unable to recognize its own power, privilege and penetration (Minh-Ha, 1989). A seminal post-colonial scholar, Deborah Bird Rose (2004, p154) exclaims; 'What is not in doubt in modern thought is that the west collectively is the leader; it is closest to the future, and the rest of the world follows along behind' – this power and politics is expressed in design where theories, illustrated by Bousbaci, constitute its centre and remain as the main point of reference.

2.5

Design and Social Innovation in Asia-Pacific

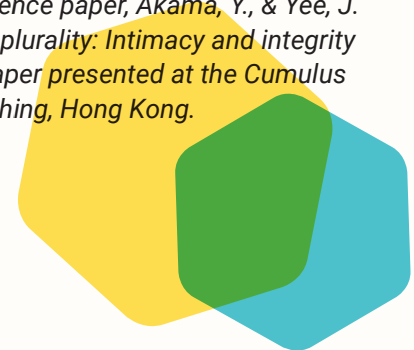


These concerns and observations fuelled our motivation to host two international symposia and workshops in Singapore (2015) and Bangkok (2016) on Design and Social Innovation in Asia-Pacific. The political agenda behind DESIAP takes on the heterogeneous characteristics of Asia-Pacific, a region consisting of a constellation of islands, countries and a continent where many indigenous traditions have been resilient in spite of colonization. These events convened academics and practitioners who are initiating change in Australia, Cambodia, China, Japan, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Taiwan and Thailand. They generously shared their personal experiences of actively creating spaces and places for meaningful engagement, skills sharing, capacity building and purposeful transformation. DESIAP Bangkok 2016 also brought together leading researchers in the UK and the US whose participatory practices have strong feminist and post-colonial undercurrents that recognize difference and pursue questions of power structures in their sites of intervention.

The DESIAP speakers share diversity in heritage, upbringing and in places where they choose to live and work, where many have experienced cultural difference throughout their lives, embodying such plurality and recognition of ideas that have been exchanged globally for centuries. As such, we have all come to this to trouble literal and simplistic distinctions of cultures that are assigned to countries, nations or groups of people. The agenda for DESIAP

is not to set up dualisms or to displace dominant constructs in design. Following Homi Bhaba (1984, p127), our work here is to disrupt a dominant gaze and power, to continually produce slippage and difference to resist conformity. This discursive process 'does not merely "rupture" the [colonial] discourse, but becomes transformed into an uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as a "partial" ... "incomplete" and "virtual"'(ibid). By calling out the partial, incomplete and virtual idea of the dominant constructs of design, we seek to find a 'middle ground' and what the cultural philosopher Thomas Kasulis (2002) might call 'complementary gestalt' or 'bicultural orientation' that side steps simplistic dualisms of West/East, North/South or even episteme vs phronesis to further entangle and knit our work towards rich and salient themes we see as compelling to consider for Design and Social Innovation practice and discourse.

Excerpt taken from published conference paper, Akama, Y., & Yee, J. (2016, Nov 21-24). Seeking stronger plurality: Intimacy and integrity in designing for social innovation. Paper presented at the Cumulus Hong Kong: Open Design for E-very-thing, Hong Kong.



3

DESIAP Network

The Design and Social Innovation in Asia-Pacific Research Network cohered change-makers and researchers to understand and support diverse practices in Asia-Pacific. It commenced with the *From Things to Services* symposium and workshop in Singapore in 2015. In January 2016 we received an Arts & Humanities Research Council in the UK (AHRC) Research Network funding with the expressed aim create a research network by bringing together UK and Asia-Pacific researchers. With this focus on building a research community, DESIAP has enabled collaboration, knowledge generation and increased project visibility and research impact. In doing so, it not only consolidates and expands upon the existing DESIAP platform, but further brings together the different communities of researchers and a broad range of practitioners to build research capacity in this field. DESIAP has since facilitated a symposium and a series of workshops in Thailand, Cambodia, Myanmar and the UK.





3.1 Advisory Board

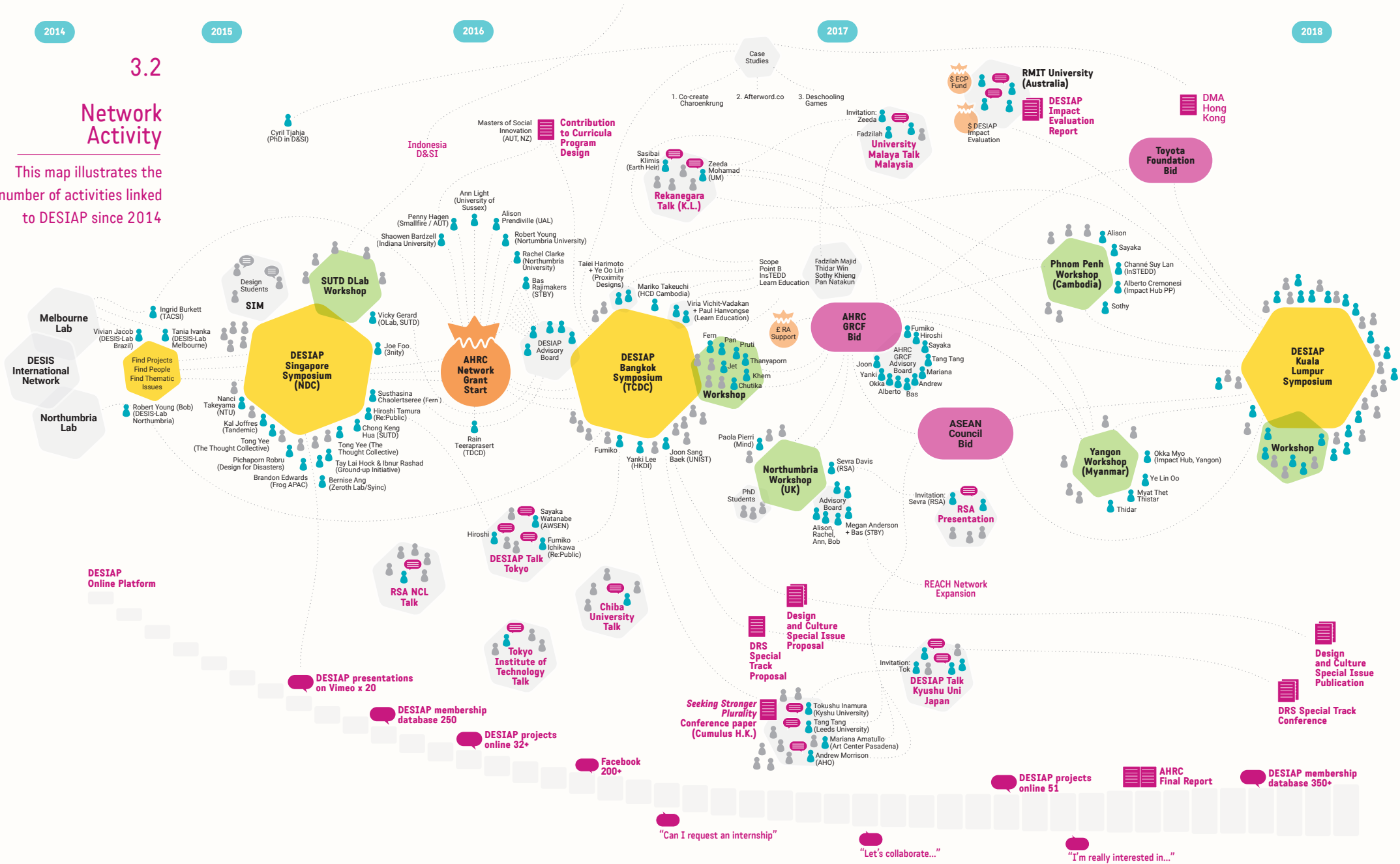
These events were guided by an impressive international Advisory Board. Many board members took part in key research network activities, contributing content, knowledge and experience. They shaped the agenda of the workshops and symposium, including final selection of invited speakers, presenters and participants, and co-authored a collection of papers for the Design and Culture Special Issue. Over one third of the Advisory Board members are active practitioners specialising in Design and Social Innovation. They consist of:

- [Professor Ann Light](#), University of Sussex (UK)
- [Professor Robert Young](#), Northumbria University (UK)
- [Associate Professor Adam Thorpe](#), University of the Arts London, (UK)
- [Dr Alison Prendiville](#), University of the Arts, LCC (UK)
- [Dr Rachel Clarke](#), Culture Lab, Newcastle University (UK)
- [Dr Bas Raijmakers](#), STBY, UK and The Design Academy (UK/The Netherlands)
- [Associate Professor Shaowen Bardzell](#), Indiana University (US/Taiwan)
- [Dr Viria Vichit-Vadakan](#), G-Lab, Thammasat University, Bangkok (Thailand)
- [Dr Joon Sang Baek](#), Ulsan National Institute of Science and Technology (Korea)
- [Victoria Gerrard](#), Singapore University of Technology and Design (Singapore)
- [Dr Yanki Lee](#), Hong Kong Design Institute (Hong Kong)
- [Fumiko Ichikawa](#), Re:Public Inc (Japan)
- [Dr Penny Hagen](#), Innovation Change (New Zealand)
- [Dr Idil Gaziulusoy](#), Victorian Eco Innovation Lab (Australia)
- [Mariko Takeuchi](#), Human-Centred Lab (Cambodia)
- [Joseph Foo](#), 3nity, Neighbour Programme (Malaysia)

3.2

Network Activity

This map illustrates the number of activities linked to DESIAP since 2014



3.3

From Things to Services—Singapore

5–6th February 2015

The inaugural DESIAP event took place at the National Design Centre, Singapore, on 5–6th February 2015. *From Things to Services: The Rise of Service Design and Social Innovation in Asia-Pacific* attracted over 150 people during the two-day event to share stories, inspire ideas, stimulate discussion, provoke thinking and collaboratively explore what it means to design in this social innovation landscape. The international audience of academics, policy makers and practitioners signalled a strong interest and opportunity for Design and Social Innovation in the region.

From Things to Services brought together a unique gathering of change-makers in Asia-Pacific who are all shaping the landscape of Design and Social Innovation in the region. Day One of the event brought together fourteen speakers in a public symposium to address themes including 'Social impact through an educational platform', 'Social practices in innovation & design', and 'Social impact in the field'. The following speakers (listed alphabetically) generously shared their personal experiences of how they are actively creating spaces and places for meaningful engagement, skills sharing, capacity building and purposeful transformation:

- [Bernise Ang](#), co-founder and executive director of Zeroth Lab and Syinc
- [Carol Candler](#), evaluation consultant from the Lien Centre for Social Innovation
- [Suthasina Chaolertseree](#), service designer from the Thai Health Promotion Foundation
- [Brandon Edwards](#), executive creative director & co-founder of Frog APAC
- [Joseph Foo](#), designer from 3nity, 3X, Neighbour Program
- [Vicki Gerrard](#), co-founder and executive director from Opportunity Lab at the Singapore University of Technology & Design (SUTD)
- [Kal Joffres](#), CEO of Tandemic
- [Chong Keng Hua](#), Assistant Professor from Singapore University of Technology & Design (SUTD)
- [Vipavee Kunavichayanont](#), founder of Design for Disasters
- [Tay Lai Hock](#), Founder and Kampung Chief of Ground-up Initiative and [M. Ibnur Rashad](#), Co-Inventor of iBam and Kampung Scientist of Ground-up Initiative
- [Nanci Takeyama](#), Assistant Professor from Nanyang Technological University
- [Hiroshi Tamura](#), co-founder of Re:public. Inc.
- [Tong Yee](#), co-founder of The Thought Collective







3.3

Day Two aimed to synthesise the themes, issues, opportunities, questions arising from first day through a participatory workshop. From this, it became clear that design is no longer just the domain of professionals possessing specific design knowledge to solve problems on behalf of other people. Most DESIAP 2015 speakers were not trained in traditional disciplines of design. In other words, designing was also performed by non-design experts who have local knowledge, social relationships and specific entrepreneurial competencies. Design was acknowledged as a valuable catalyst to enable people to draw on their latent resources and creativity to co-design, co-create and co-make new ways to address the challenges they face. In addition to these insights, several concerns and questions also emerged during the two days:

- What alternative models of design practice and design education are needed in order to foster social innovation more widely in the Asia-Pacific?
- What other qualities, skills, mindsets and conditions are conducive to this kind of work, and how can they be identified?

- What problems are 'relevant' or have urgency to be tackled, and how do we identify opportunities, networks and spaces to work in?
- How can we foster and build a community of practice that can meaningfully share, when most practitioners in this space are already over-worked and time-poor?
- How do we mainstream the social? As researchers, practitioners and educators, how do we help make the focus on the social a norm for design, instead of its current perception of it being unconventional?
- What issues are best tackled by a top-down approach, and what other concerns are better being a bottom-up approach? What could be a blended approach of the two, and towards what purpose

These concerns and questions informed the continued development of the DESIAP platform and seeded the Research Network proposal submitted to the AHRC.

3.5.1

DESIAP 2016 Symposium and Workshop – Bangkok 12–14th July 2016

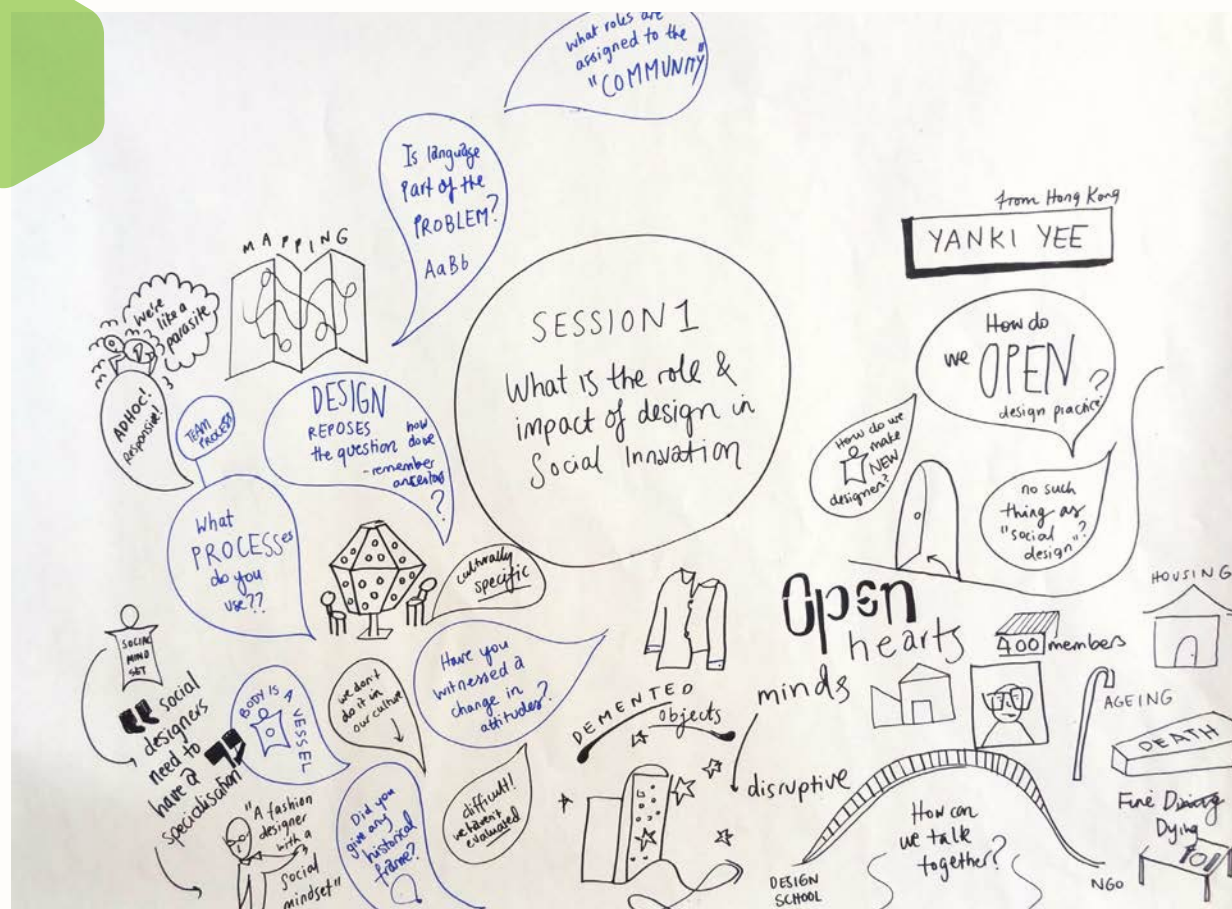
The DESIAP 2016 Symposium and Workshop was the first major activity that was funded by the UK's AHRC Research Network. The Public Symposium was held on 12th July 2016 at the Thailand Creative and Design Center in Bangkok and brought together academics and practitioners who are initiating change in Australia, Cambodia, China, Japan, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, The Netherlands, Singapore, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand, the UK, and the US.

The speakers, listed alphabetically, included:

- [Joon Sang Baek](#), Ulsan National Institute of Science and Technology (Korea)
- [Shaowen Bardzell](#), Indiana University (Taiwan / US)
- [Ingrid Burkett](#), The Australian Centre for Social Innovation (Australia)
- [Rachel Clarke](#), Open Lab, Newcastle University (UK)
- [Miaosen Gong](#), Jiangnan University (China)
- [Taiei Harimoto](#), Proximity Designs (Myanmar)
- [Fumiko Ichikawa](#), Re:Public Inc (Japan)
- [Yanki Lee](#), Hong Kong Design Institute & EXHIBIT (China & UK)
- [Ann Light](#), University of Sussex (UK)
- [Alison Prendiville](#), University of the Arts, LCC (UK)
- [Bas Raijmakers](#), STBY, UK and The Design Academy (UK/The Netherlands)
- [Andrea Siodmok](#), Policy Lab, Cabinet Office (UK)
- [Mariko Takeuchi](#), Design Strategy Consultant for the developing world (Cambodia)
- [Viria Vichit-Vadakan](#), Learn Education, Bangkok (Thailand)
- [Robert Young](#), Northumbria University (UK)

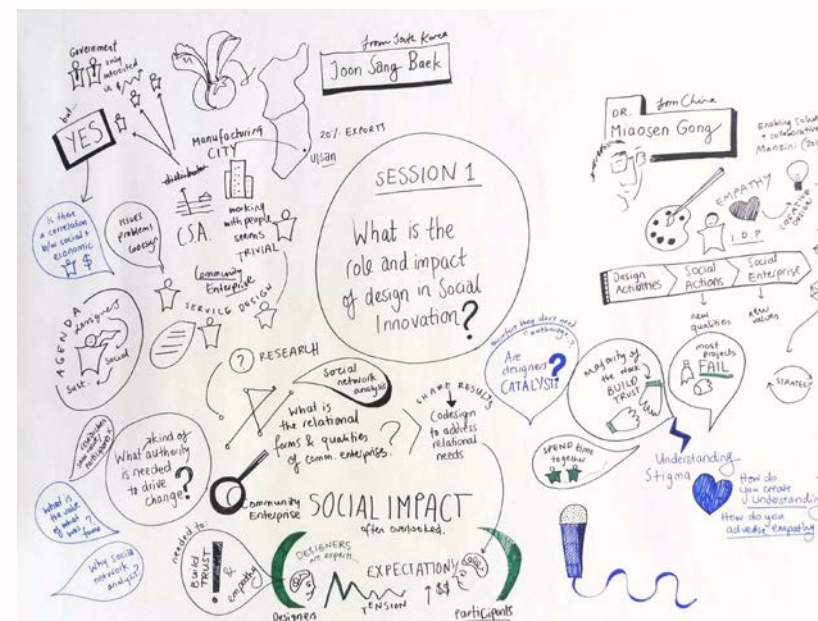






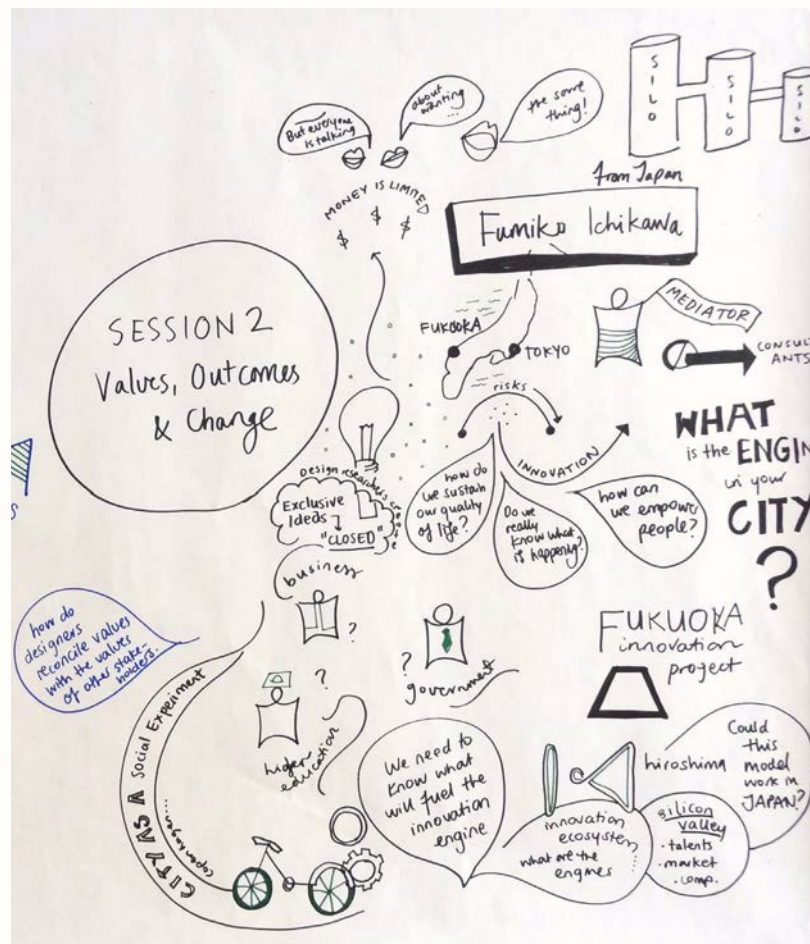
3.5.1

The symposium and its accompanying two-day workshop builds on the insights and outcomes from DESIAP 2015 event, *From Things to Services*. These were further developed, through input by the Advisory Board members, to generate the following themes and questions. Each presenter spoke to these themes. Visual notes (above) were taken during each session by Kirsty Moegerlein. The presentations and discussions from the symposium have been made publicly accessible, and are available on the DESIAP vimeo channel [here](#).



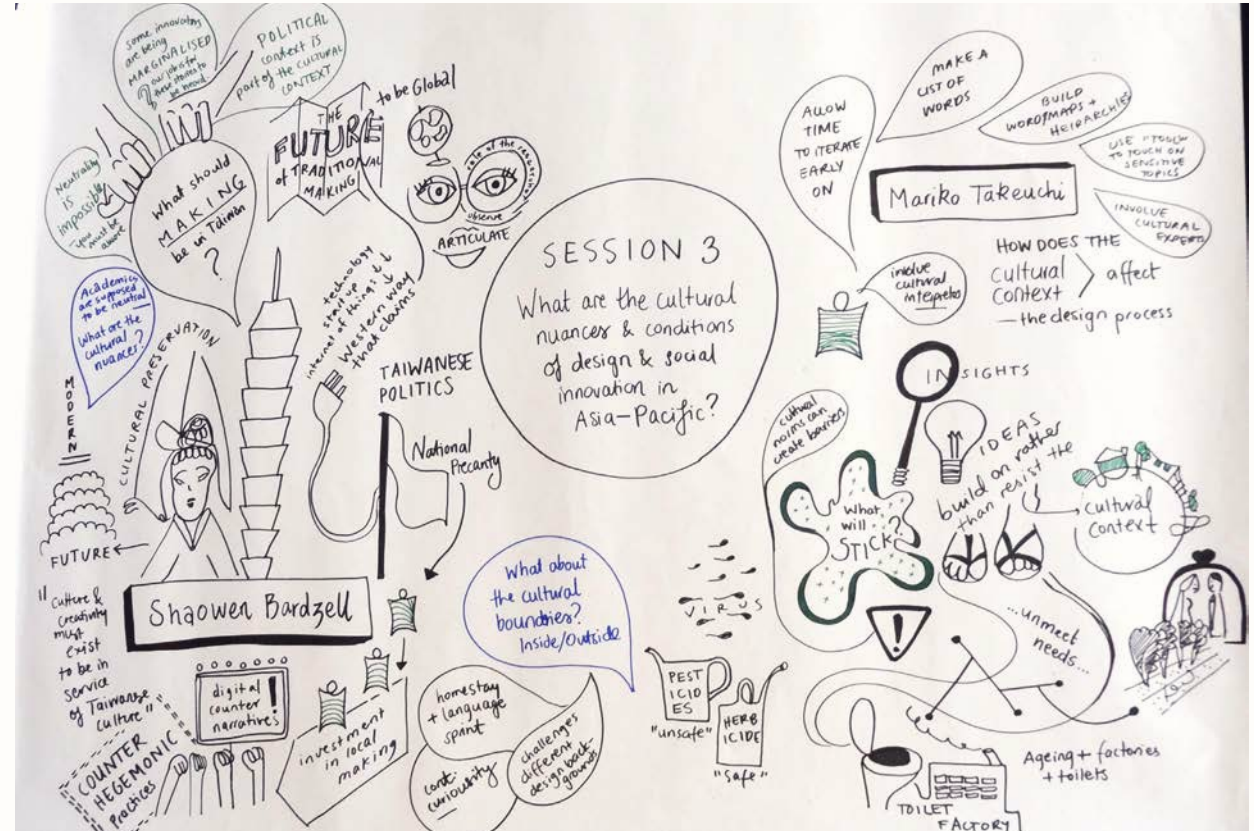
1. What is the role and impact of design in social innovation?

Is design performed by experts / professionals, or 'diffused' in action by everyday people in their work or what they observe? Does it manifest as an artefact, method, attitude or in systems? How, why and what forms are recognised as design in different contexts and how are they contributing to 'change'? What is the role of design and the designer in these contexts, taking into account possible conflict that might arise from discrepancy between the needs of a community or society as a system and those of individuals when designing social innovation?



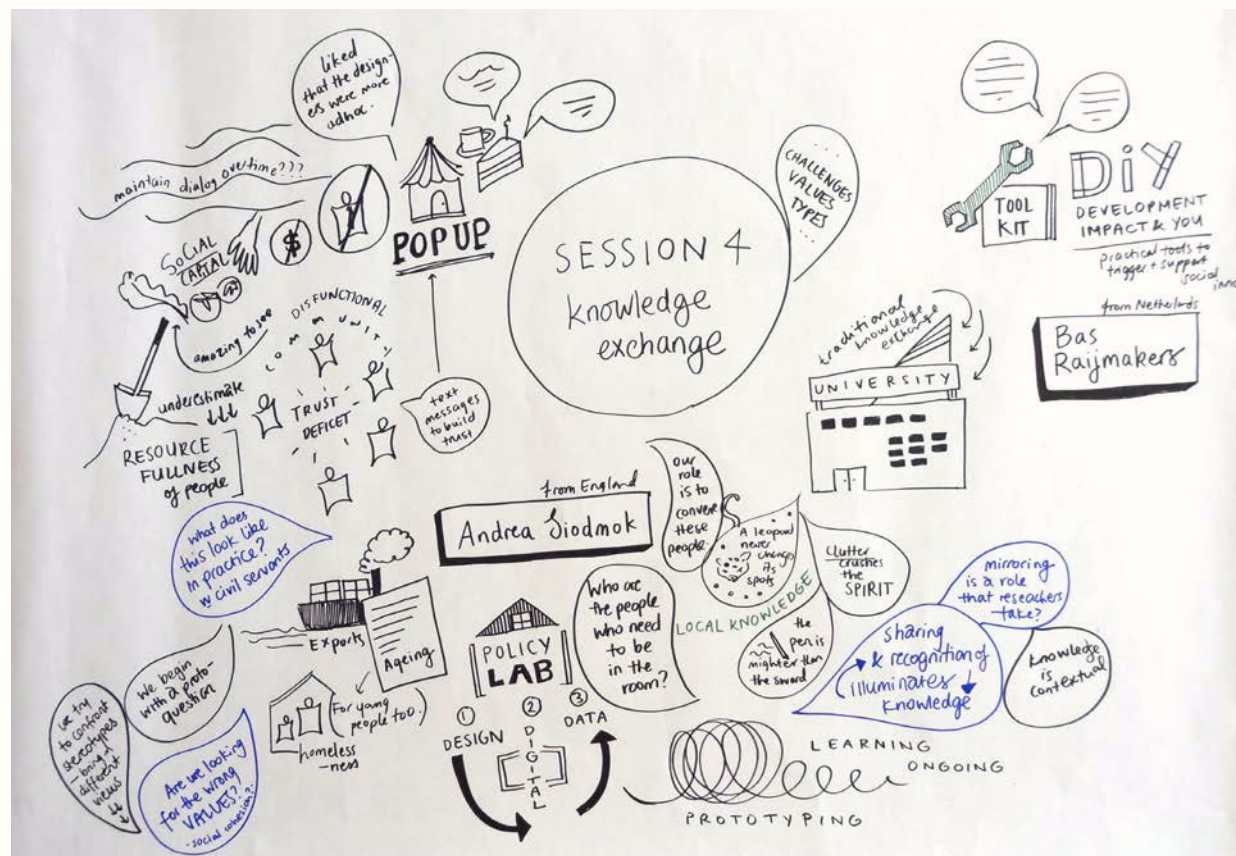
2. Value, outcomes and change

What sort of value is created through social innovation projects? How might such projects facilitate better community understandings or collaboration around a particular issue, new service solutions, greater inclusivity of different groups, empowerment or independence? How do we measure outcomes / change? How do we connect outcomes with evaluation? What are the unexpected consequences and how can they be brought to the fore? How do we emphasise 'a design process' as well as its outcomes?



3. What are the cultural nuances and conditions of design and social innovation in Asia-Pacific?

How do these dimensions affect people, institutions, issues, systems and the way designing is enabling social innovation in local contexts? Do they change over the time of the project? How do we as practitioners / researchers understand these dimensions through a process of design vs just observing / studying them for instance? How are power relations played out in projects? Are they reflected in gender, money, societal hierarchy or positions of people in institutions? What strategies, tactics and sensitivities are needed to navigate the political landscape to enable design to work effectively in this space?



4. Knowledge exchange

It is largely recognised that examples and descriptions of case studies is not enough for knowledge transfer, requiring a deeper level of analysis and abstraction to enable translation and dissemination to other contexts. Recognising this, what other forms and ways can practitioners effectively share their knowledge? What skills, methods, training would a community have and what do they need in order to translate context-specific learnings into broader



and general application, especially for non-researchers? How is capacity nurtured in the community involved? How can we create a safe environment so that knowledge is not exchanged only with references to successful projects but also failed projects? How do we teach, support and mentor students who may come from different regions but wish to work in Asia-Pacific?



5. Legacy and sustainment

How are social innovation initiatives sustained beyond a 'project' timeline especially since funding is often time-limited? What type of infrastructure (knowledge, network, funding, relationships etc) can enable / has enabled its sustainability? What kind of capacity building is undertaken to ensure continuous transformation processes? Is successful 'implementation' relevant or challenging to a context? When does one 'exit' a project, pass it on, and if so what is passed on?





3.4.1

DESIAP 2016 Workshop – Bangkok

13–14th July 2016

A two-day workshop was held at the Thailand Creative and Design Center in Bangkok on the 13-14th of July, following on from the public symposium. Out of the 30 participants that attended, half comprised the DESIAP network members from the UK and Asia-Pacific, while half of the participants came from a range of Thai public, private and educational organisations. The aim of the workshop was to analyse the project examples, presentations, and discussions from the public symposium, and to discuss and further develop the themes and insights that had emerged. The full proceedings and outcomes have been summarised and made publicly accessible in a report available [here](#).

Broad-ranging and rich discussions took place over an intense two days, seeking to explore the following questions:

- If social innovation is conventionally seen as a bottom-up approach to citizen participation, how does it happen in the Asia-Pacific?
- What alternative models of design practice and design education are needed in order to foster social innovation more widely in the Asia-Pacific?
- What shifts in thinking, theory and methodology are needed to re-frame the Design and Social Innovation discourse in the West?
- What conditions compare or resonate with contexts in the UK?
- What other qualities, skills, mindsets and conditions are conducive, and how can they be identified?



3.4.1

Workshop Day One – Morning Session

The two-day workshop was split into morning and afternoon sessions. Day One morning session began by referring to the graphic notations that were created for each speaker at the symposium. These summative documentations enabled participants to recollect what was shared, further triggering what they wanted to explore over the two-day workshop. Their suggestions covered an entire wall, then clustered into four themes: **a)** the qualities of design; **b)** the meaning of social innovation; **c)** the designer's role in social innovation; and **d)** education & learning. Participants self-allocated into groups according to their chosen themes to discuss at length, before presenting their insights to the larger group. The discussion points and insights are summarised as follows.

a) Qualities of Design: This group discussed a wide range of topics related to design, social innovation and what it means to be a good practitioner.

- Participants generally preferred the use of the word 'design' to describe a mindset used in social innovation, rather than to describe a role that one takes – i.e. a designer.
- Learning the language of design was seen as an important process that helps to communicate the value of what might already be tacitly known by practitioners.
- Participants drew attention to what has come before 'social innovation' and questioned whether it is perhaps a new term for an older process, i.e. community development. This discussion raised questions surrounding what differentiates social innovation from community development.
- Participants agreed that they needed to interrogate assumptions in order to be good practitioners.
- Participants raised questions surrounding what it means to be doing social innovation. These questions demonstrate the need for a better articulation of what is actually going on in the work of social innovation.

3.4.1



b) The meaning of social innovation: Participants recognised that innovation is something that is not owned by design or designers. Many other disciplines use this word. Innovation can also mean many different things.

- Innovation is something that is not owned by designers – it is used by a variety of disciplines, and within the context of social innovation, innovation is often local and contextual.
- Perhaps what designers try to do in social innovation is help people deal with change as a continuous effort.
- Designers working in the context of social innovation require an appreciation and awareness of their role, emergence, politics and complexity.

c) The designer's role: This group worked through a sense-making process and designed a map of the key words they associated with social innovation. They moved from the question of what is the designer's role in social innovation to a discussion of education and learning.

- Within social innovation, designers are often working with complexity and data.
- Designers can help visualise and communicate within this context, resulting in the development of ideas and iterative prototyping in collaboration with communities.
- Solutions are never definitive, they change alongside the society that is also changing.
- Preconceptions have no place in social innovation, however sometimes there's a tension between the social impact practitioners would like to make and what is feasible within the social-political context.



d) Education and learning: This group explored design education and its challenges in relation to social innovation. The group created a series of post-it notes with ideas and asked the rest of the participants to build on these ideas. They adopted the Montessori method and in doing so, recognised that designers needn't always invent new methods in order to innovate.

3.4.1

Workshop Day One – Afternoon Session

Following the morning's discussions, the participants further focussed on three themes: **e)** mindset, **f)** drivers of social innovation, and **g)** meaning, and again, self-selected the group they were interested in.

e) Mindset: This group identified issues, concerns and questions of value, balance between growth, ethics and the 'right question'. These points became starting points for a discussion on whether design was a role or a mindset.

- Collaboration and sharing is important to the success of social innovation initiatives, yet building relationships takes time and can be in tension with deadlines.
- Within this context designers and researchers are never neutral.
- Disagreements within relationships can facilitate breakthroughs.

f) The drivers of social innovation: This group mapped the drivers of social innovation. There were high level drivers and personal level drivers. They tried to locate these drivers in five different forms of capital – human, manufactured, natural resources, social and economic. Most of the drivers were negative. However there were some positive examples.

- Poor governance, corruption, natural and man-made disasters often lead to citizen-led social innovation. The absence of strong and positive leadership drives people to create solutions for themselves.
- Many practitioners who work in social innovation possess a desire to change the social context for the better. This includes striving for things like: social inclusion, equality, justice, and fairness. These were identified as high-held concepts that drive activities.



- The group discussed where it might be possible to intervene in some of the issues that were identified. Suggestions included: stakeholder engagement across sectors or different levels of government; neutral bodies tasked with the regulation of social enterprises; a recognition of lobbying as a career pathway; and access to knowledge assets.

g) Meaning: Participants spent time further defining social innovation. They decided that social innovation should be defined as a field and not a discipline. They reasoned that many disciplines contribute to social innovation and a better understanding of what each discipline brings to social innovation is needed, including what it might be possible to 'grow' within this field.

- Social innovation is a field and not a discipline.
- Parallels were drawn between the early stages of service design and social innovation. However, some suggested that service design is about designing process, whereas social innovation often involves reconfiguring relationships towards a purposeful end.
- While design might not be very good at engaging in politics, it was stated that design is very good at defusing politics. By allowing multiple voices to be heard, positive change can be leveraged through design.



3.4.1

Workshop Day Two – Morning and Afternoon Sessions

Day two was more outcome focused and discussed various challenges such as, implementation of the outcomes of the workshop, different frames of interpretation for Design and Social Innovation, and sustaining the community after the symposium. After a series of exercises and extended discussions, the participants broke into several groups.

One group discussed a companion piece, such as a zine or playbook, that could be used as a means to capture the outcomes of the symposium and workshop to make it accessible for non-academics. The playbook is still an evolving concept.

Two other groups consisting of DESIAP Advisory Board members, focussed on research bids and academic outcomes. This included exploring key questions that emerged from the three-day event

in Bangkok and to see if these can become a basis of a research bid. Of particular interest to the UK researchers was a way to learn from models of social innovation in countries where there is little government supported social infrastructures, yet they are performing strongly economically. This reflected their concern for a continuing trend of reduction in public funding in the UK in order to prepare for a shift towards a self-sustaining model.

Another focused on generating a series of themes that addressed salient questions and issues observed in the presentations and workshop. These themes, summarised on the next page, provide useful footholds for what we observed and analysed, and have become a fulcrum to cohere a Special Issue in [*Design & Culture Journal* \(August 2018 publishing tbc\).](#)



3.4.1

Cultural nuance: Design and Social Innovation projects are undertaken in culturally specific contexts yet they are also buffeted by the same global dynamics of economical and political influences, where assumptions of a 'generic' designer is just as problematic as seeing individuals or groups of people identified by a taxonomized cultural background based on geographical or nationalized categories. These insights have similarly shaped discourses in postcolonial HCI that 'speak at once to the highly local and contingent practices that we see at work in different specific sites of technology design and use, while at the same time recognizing the ways that those localisms are conditioned and embedded within global and historical flows of material, people, capital, knowledge and technology' (Irani et. al 2010, p1317). When design/designers step into conditions and circumstances for social change, they can disrupt existing practices, reconfigure local power-dynamics and shift gender relations in intentional or unknowing ways, but either way, design/designers are implicated in becoming a constituent of transforming cultural practices. In foregrounding cultural nuances when designing with others, what issues, questions and concerns are significant to keep in view? What can help those who intervene, including stakeholders with certain agendas and existing practices, as well as the 'local community', be aware of and work with existing and morphing cultural logics?

Relationship: Discourses in social innovation have highlighted the significance of interpersonal relationships and the resources and exchanges that come from those relationships that create value. The proposition that relationships are the prerequisite and outcome of social innovations makes their interaction reciprocal and inseparable. Despite their importance, relationships and their outcomes (e.g. care, engagement, and reciprocity) in social innovation have not been emphasised in design research as much as tools and technique. Several reasons are speculated. They are highly contingent and dynamic, which makes it complex to understand how they form, develop and degenerate; they cannot be controlled nor manufactured, and thus excluded from the scope of design; and it is difficult to measure their contributions to social innovation. There is a lack of theoretical and methodological knowledge that addresses the challenges of understanding their complex forms and nature, methodologies to influence them through design interventions, and evaluating them in line with the goal of social innovations. How could we analyse and construct frameworks to understand relationships and facilitate the forming of relationships desirable in social innovation? What are the existing theoretical and methodological approaches relevant to analysing, designing for, and evaluating relationships in social innovation?

3.4.1

Risk, precariousness and uncertainty: Most change-making initiatives are often accompanied by risky, turbulent and precarious contexts, especially when undertaken with communities that have its own histories, politics, dynamics, structures, relations and boundaries. Social innovation projects are seen to deal with risk by 'sharing risk', 'reducing risks' and aiming for 'reasonable reliable risk' (Murray et al 2010), indicating the history and cultures that such projects are framed within. The very term 'risk' is historically situated in the emergence of modernity, beginning with the Enlightenment of human progress and social order that can be explained objectively, scientifically and rationally (Lupton, 1999). When projects are always a precarious balancing act how does culture play a role in describing or understanding uncertainty differently, such as ambiguity, illusion, magic and spiritual forces that shape configurations of change?

Temporality: Design celebrates a future orientation, following the European modern thought of pursuing a story of progress. The desire to change situations to preferred ones (Simon, 1968) means that its orientation is always future-focused. The proposition for a 'radical innovation' is a way of thinking, behaving and problem-solving that is discontinuous with local 'mainstream' practices (Manzini 2015). But what do we forget and ignore when there is an obsession with the future? For example, how do we maintain connection with people and sites of our intervention and be part of its continuing change process while working with logistical constraints of distance and resources? Rather than design being oriented towards the future, what can be learnt, protected, preserved and shared in history, tradition and existing practices as a form of continuous and incremental 'social innovation' in contrast to a 'radical' departure? If design were to abandon its function to change situations into preferred ones, and accept that change is already happening as rhythms that animate the world that have their own pace and flow, how do we 'attune' ourselves to this resonance and dissonance?



Impact: Challenges of evaluating the impact of social innovation and in particular design's contribution to this new and emerging field extends back to the definition of innovation, which is embedded in the industrial and technological approach with established means of measurement. When design is seen as a contributor to innovation it is presented as 'a driver, input or tool for innovation rather than the innovation itself' (EU Design as a Driver of user-centred innovation 2009, p13), compounded by poor understanding of design. Design, as its very essence, is messy and entangled with various dimensions that are affective, tacit, implicit and contextually specific and sit in opposition to economic, science and technology knowledge of quantitative, explicit and codified measurement (Jensen et al, 2007). What can we learn from qualitative and long-term evaluation of social outcomes and how can it evaluate impact in very specific cultural contexts?



3.5

Northumbria University Workshop – Newcastle, UK

8-9th November 2016

The emerging themes (discussed on the previous page) became a useful structure for the workshop at Northumbria University, where several Design and Social Innovation practitioners and researchers in the UK gathered. Most participants did not have direct Asia-Pacific links but saw interest in attending for various reasons, for example:

a) to learn from the region to inform their own practice; b) an interest to work in the area in the future; c) are already working in the region and would like to extend their learning. The participants also include Advisory Board members who presented at the Bangkok event (*):



- [Megan Anderson](#), STBY
- [Rachel Clarke](#), Open Lab, Newcastle University *
- [Sevra Davis](#), RSA
- [Robert Djelanni](#), PhD student, Northumbria University
- [Ann Light](#), University of Sussex *
- [Justin Marshal](#), Northumbria University
- [Paolo Pieri](#), Mind
- [Alison Prendiville](#), University of the Arts, LCC *
- [Bas Raijmakers](#), STBY, UK and The Design Academy *
- [Cyril Tjhaja](#), PhD student, Northumbria University
- [Laura Warwick](#), Northumbria University & Mind
- [Aldo Valencia](#), PhD student, Northumbria University
- [Pratik Vyas](#), PhD student, Northumbria University
- [Robert Young](#), Northumbria University *



3.5

During the workshop, the participants self-selected their own groups to share how the following six themes, derived from the Bangkok workshop, were relevant to their practices, alongside an introduction to their own projects or research. This further provided an opportunity to listen to thoughts and reflections from other people's practices, and also to develop questions about their own practice. We provided a set of questions to trigger the discussion. Through this sharing, the group re-acknowledged the significance of culture, language, relationships, tradition and religion in Design and Social Innovation, illustrated in projects from the Asia-Pacific. This diversity of difference reflected the heterogeneity of Asia-Pacific as a region, yet the group further recognized that this diversity is not understood very well in design.

Cultural nuances

- In foregrounding cultural nuances when designing with others, what issues, questions and concerns are significant to keep in view?
- What can help those who intervene, including stakeholders with certain agendas and existing practices, as well as the 'local community', be aware of and work with existing and morphing cultural logics?
- If intercultural translation is an ideology and not possible pragmatically, how do we work with and within misalignment, miscommunication and misunderstandings, and not see these as failures or negative qualities?

Several challenges were identified when situating design in different cultural contexts, and the need to guard against over-systemising design in delivering solutions in order to work with local conditions. Although universal models such as the Design Council's Double Diamond can be useful to help non-designers understand the design process at the beginning, the group discussed how design needs to be incorporated into a more nuanced way of working.

Insights drawn from DESIAP Singapore and Bangkok was referenced to discuss the importance of pursuing a non-individualistic agenda and be sensitive to political, social and economic agendas. The participants emphasised how important it was to pursue this type of work through an informed politicised lens. This requires an acknowledgment of different ways of working, with one participant using the analogy of cooking from the same ingredients to create different dishes. When culture is dynamic and disrupted continuously, designers need to support communities in responsive ways, rather than churning out solutions that can ignore and in some cases over-riding local practices. A more appropriate term, therefore, might be to focus on 'growing' rather than 'scaling' impact, where the latter is commonly used in Design and Social Innovation, echoing design's legacy in industrialisation that favoured repetition.

3.5

Relationship

- How do relationship feature and foster in your practice?
- What could help us understand its complexity? Language, frameworks?
- What are the approaches relevant to designing for and evaluating relationships in social innovation?

We are used to the narrative of design as a quality of individuals equipped with the appropriate creative flair, methods and tools. This contrasts with practices in Design and Social Innovation where relationship and collaboration is central. Design here acts more as a catalyst and relationship builder rather than a solution creator, to shape interpersonal relationships (one to one or one to many) and also create connections with objects, process and organisations. Reciprocity featured as a key quality to relationship building. The group then wondered how relationship building can be taught. While they acknowledged that it might be a challenge, what could be the basic elements that can be learnt? Bas Raijmakers suggested using the Socratic conversation method as an example that can help build skills of active listening, like summarising the previous conversation and building on it as a way to foster group discussion. Communication incorporates many verbal, nonverbal and visual forms that can require different qualities of listening, observing and response. These soft skills are not commonly taught in design schools. Additionally, the group discussed the more esoteric, unspoken dimensions of relationships and how temporality comes into play, ie delayed, immediate and long-term effects? When relationships ebb and flow, the notion of time also surfaced as being important to consider, in contrast to the way designers define their work, usually through projects with a predetermined start and finish.

Precariousness / risk

- How does precariousness feature in your project?
- If it were always a condition of doing social innovation, how would you embrace it?
- Risk can be associated with creativity. How would you nurture risk-taking rather than treat it as a negative element that needs to be managed?

Risk, uncertainty and precariousness were stated by the participants as constant conditions of designing, not just for social innovation. Here design can act in a way to help people feel comfortable with risk, yet such design requires many reciprocal acts to build trust. In order to build trust, one has to reciprocate and be vulnerable. This can put the researcher/designer in a 'precarious' position. How can we talk about this vulnerability without being fearful? Are there ways to teach and manage this? How do we determine an appropriate level of risk to take? Such dialogue is needed to build trust. On the flipside, precarity can often be the catalyst for change. As Laura Warwick emphasised through her own experience with Tyneside Mind, 'risk and interdependence is a prerequisite of trust'. There are also different types of trust, as a designer (capabilities) and as a person (shared values). Respectful design means finding a commonality between needs. In contrast, the group highlighted the mismatch with the way design thinking is 'sold' as a process without considering the integrity of the person who gains the trust to take risks with the stakeholders. Arguably, this is as important as someone knowing a design process.

3.5

Temporality

- What are the consequences of taking an industrialised model of design (i.e. emphasis on quick and efficient) into Design and Social Innovation projects?
- When is the 'start' or 'end' of a 'project'?
- How do we take into consideration the change already happening in these multiple sites of action and how do you become sensitive to it?

Design has always been obsessed with the end product. This concerned the group because it means that, as designers, our interest is conditioned only to last up to the point when the product or solution is delivered, when the project has 'ended'. How can we address this fixation and find ways to consider a shared landscape over time? Is 'project' a useful term for Design and Social Innovation? Paola Pierri, Mind's Service Design and Innovation Manager, suggested that we adopt an anthropological approach to place our focus in the current, rather than a future timeframe. Not only does this help us consider various aspects of design's intervention across time, it can help us value process over outcomes, relationships over outputs.

The participants spoke of the difficulty of developing an in-depth understanding of a subject, context and develop meaningful relationships within a short space of time. This challenge is particularly acute when designers parachute in and out of context, due to limited time and budget to resource their engagement over a longer period. Design and Social Innovation examples shared during DESIAP events thus featured designers that are already embedded within organisations and communities. Here, equipping embedded change-agents with design or focusing on ways to build capacity through training within an organisation indicates a promising avenue for sustained impact.

Ethics

- Given Design and Social Innovation are often buffeted by external and unforeseeable changes, how do we remain responsive and not reactive and yet still strive for something meaningful?
- What is our professional and moral standpoint? And how do we consider other people's viewpoints particularly if they differ from ours? How are disagreements managed?
- How are these concerns and many others kept alive and in view in the moments of our engagements, especially in professional practice where there might be less opportunities to critically reflect and challenge these issues?

Many participants, being academics and researchers, were familiar with ethics requirements for undertaking research. While ethics procedures in academia can seem dogmatic and ungiving, it offers a useful basic framework to avoid harm, be aware of power dynamics and consider the participants centrally in any research activity. Yet in contrast, ethics in professional design practice is not taught explicitly or made conscious when undertaking projects, leading many to take an a-moral stance. Design as a profession originated to serve industry needs rather than social or people's concerns, and the focus on clients has remained the main emphasis. The recent emergence of user-centred or human-centred design still has tendency to create desirable products rather than truly address social needs. This shift from designing products to influencing behaviours and relationships in Design and Social Innovation requires explicit attentiveness on ethics, as well as a closer examination of what designers are doing in relation to others.



Impact

- What does impact mean to you and your stakeholders? How do you even begin to make sense of it?
- How do you reconcile different expectations of the stakeholders especially in terms of desired/unintended impact?
- When impact might not be immediate, how would you anticipate, track or evaluate it in social innovation project?
- What about unintentional/unforeseen impact? How do you avoid the possibility of unfavourable impact?

The participants noted the challenges of making many of the invisible impact visible. These invisible dimensions might include process, values, relationships and collaborations. Impact takes all shapes and form: immediate to longer term, small to significant and visible to invisible. The emphasis upon 'effectiveness' as a gauge for impact might be misleading, and rather, considering ways for 'affective', emotional impact could bring this invisible social value to the fore. Further discussion highlighted that impact is not static, constantly changing according to the living dynamics of its context, so there were questions about how impact as movement or reach can be 'captured'. Several examples, like the UK's *Research Excellence Framework*, were used to discuss how impact is currently being evaluated, however, the group lamented that such models tend to favour financial and economic value over a social value. This led to question how impact could be 'measured' in a person-centred way? Dramatic transformation may not be an assumed outcome of all Design and Social Innovation projects. Sometimes stability is needed rather than change.



3.6

Workshops – Phnom Penh and Yangon

25 and 26th April 2017

Yoko Akama, Joyce Yee, Alison Prendiville and Sayaka Watanabe (AWSEN) ran two workshops. The first workshop was hosted by Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI) in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, and the second at Impact Hub in Yangon, Myanmar. The aim of this event was to:

- Bring local change-makers together to hear what people are already doing;
- Introduce DESIAP through examples of projects from other countries;
- Identify barriers, resources and opportunities for Design and Social Innovation;
- Discuss how a regional network like DESIAP might play a role in sharing knowledge and assist in capacity building in Cambodia and Myanmar.

3.6

The assembled participants were a mixture of researchers, academics and representatives from social enterprises and NPOs who were doing impactful work towards enabling and sustaining social outcomes. This gathering extended the events that Impact Hub Phnom Penh, CDRI, and Impact Hub Yangon were already successfully seeding and facilitating, and it brought together a range of different sectors, perhaps for the very first time.

The following researchers and practitioners attended the Phnom Penh workshop:

- [Brendan Burke](#), Friends International
- [Kakada Chheang](#), InSTEDD iLab
- [Sovannroth Chhem](#), TRYBE
- [Kongngy Hav](#), My dream home
- [Naret Heng](#), RUPP
- [Sovannroth Heng](#), UNDP
- [Menghun Kaing](#), The Asia Foundation
- [Krisna Keo](#), ICT4D
- [Sothy Khieng](#), CDRI
- [Sokmesa Khiev](#), InSTEDD iLab
- [Kosoma Kim](#), Impact Hub
- [Dipika Kohli](#)
- [Chay Lo](#), Teuk Saat 1001
- [Melanie Mossard](#), Impact Hub
- [Napoleon Navarro](#), UNDP
- [Chhunmy Noem](#), Anakot Academy
- [Hor Peng](#), National University of Management
- [Laura Smitheman](#), Impact Hub
- [Channe Suy](#), InSTEDD iLab
- [Hing Vutha](#), CDRI



The following researchers and practitioners attended the Yangon workshop:

- [Thuzar Aung](#), Yangon University
- [Thidar Htwe Win](#), Mandalay University
- [Mya Mya Khin](#), Yangon University
- [Saw Lin Htet](#), ActionAid
- [Ye Lin Oo](#), Proximity Designs
- [Mo Lwin](#), British Council
- [Ni Ni Myint](#), ActionAid
- [Okka Myo](#), Impact Hub
- [Klaus Oberbauer](#), UNICEF
- [Htet Shine](#), SoyAi
- [Mari Tanaka](#), Nippon Foundation
- [Ko Thant](#), Myanmar Mobile Education Project
- [Myat Thet Thistar](#), EMReF



While many of the participants were not designers, they had a good grasp of design that had some meaning to their work. The conversations indicated that design was often strongly associated with art, crafts and cultural artefacts, offered through some educational institutions and other forms of traditional approaches like apprenticeships. We also heard that teaching design as method or mindset was not common. Several participants indicated the need for such training, and how capacity building for Design and Social Innovation could be possible if resources were made available or if courses were developed and provided through Universities. Here, some voiced how most people are unable to travel to take design courses overseas, let alone afford the fees. Even if they can, design that is taught outside of the local contexts may lack the specificity and nuances that are needed to particular contexts. Building the skills of an individual can only go so far, and this led to further discussion of how DESIAP as a regional platform can catalyse and support capacity in the local ecosystem. There are promising indications of many ways to leverage and build on assets already there.

The workshop further demonstrated that the participants had rich experiences, expertise, tacit knowledge, social capital and emotional intelligence that were central to their work. Such 'assets' enabled them to carve out and forge alternative routes for collaboration, work around obstacles, bridge different agendas and align interests to strive towards a common goal. Many attendees were collaborating with a diverse range of partners locally, nationally and internationally. Such robust partnerships were observed to have been built through establishing trusting relationships, and strong professional reputation. A vast amount of these assets were identified by the participants, indicating strong potential of an ecosystem of Design and Social Innovation to flourish.

4

Outputs

4.1

Public events

- Presentation and discussion with social entrepreneurs and change-makers in Tokyo, Japan, January 2016, hosted by Miratsuku NPO, Re:public Inc and Tokyo Institute of Technology
- DESIAP Bangkok Public Symposium + Workshop, July 2016
- Presentation and discussion at Rekanegara, Malaysia, July 2016
- DESIAP workshop, Northumbria University, UK, November 2016
- Presentation and discussion with researchers from KAIST (South Korea) and Kyushu University, Japan, and discussion on an edited journal on Design and Social Innovation, January 2017
- DESIAP workshop Phnom Penh and Yangon workshops, April 2017
- DESIAP lecture, Design Futures Lab lecture series, RMIT University, Australia, May 2017
- Presentation and discussion with RSA staff, UK, June 2017
- Presentation and discussion at the Faculty of Science and Technology, University of Malaya, Malaysia, July 2017

4.2

Academic outputs

- Akama, Y., & Yee, J. (2016, Nov 21-24). *Seeking stronger plurality: Intimacy and integrity in designing for social innovation*. Paper presented at the Cumulus Hong Kong: Open Design for E-everything, Hong Kong.
- Special Issue Design and Culture Journal, *Embracing Cultural Plurality: Design and Social Innovation in Asia-Pacific*, publication date August 2018 (contributions from network members)
- Design Research Society 2018 Special Track theme, *Designing social innovation in cultural diversity and with sensitivity*, co-convened by Joon Sang Baek, Ulsan National Institute of Science and Technology, South Korea; Joyce Yee, Northumbria University, UK; Yoko Akama, RMIT University, Australia; Yanki Lee, Enable Foundation, Hong Kong & Linnaeus University, Sweden; Penny Hagen, Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand.
- PhD research by Cyril Tjahja, *What constitutes Design for Social Innovation initiatives in the Asia-Pacific region*, forthcoming
- Yoko Akama and Joyce Yee invited as Advisory Board members for the Masters of Social Innovations, Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand, in collaboration with Dr Penny Hagen.

4.3

Resources

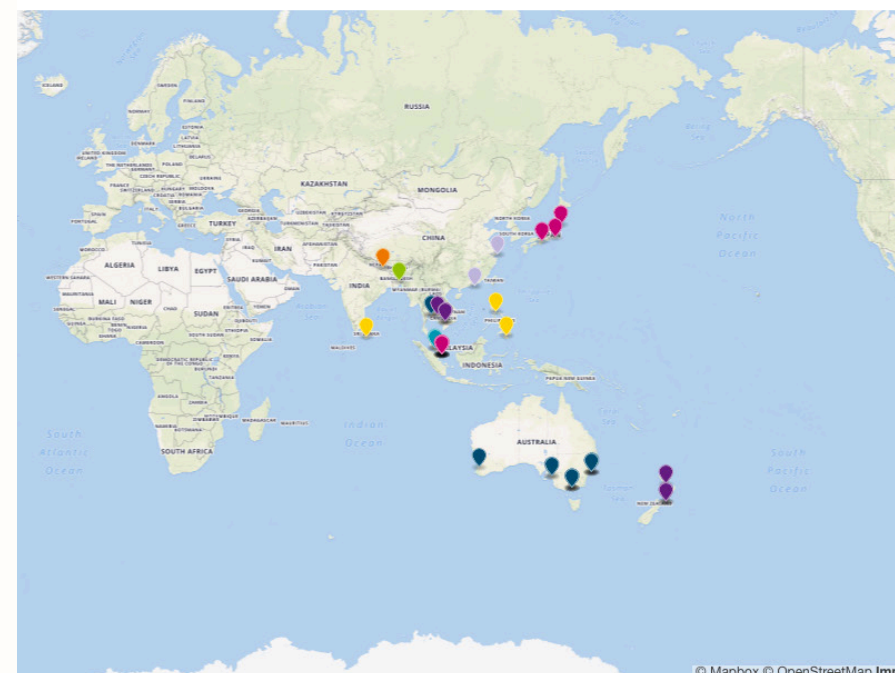
The DESIAP website desiap.org contains downloadable pdfs of papers, reports and links to various social innovators, social enterprises, funding bodies, NGOs, project initiatives, case studies, research networks, governmental bodies and companies that are undertaking Design and Social Innovation. The website has also become a repository for academic research and publications relevant to the field, and houses project notices that may arise in the future. This assures broad exposure of knowledge generated and to build resource for others to learn from, whilst leveraging existing networks to disseminate these new resources. As a platform, the website allows us to continue to facilitate dialogue and dissemination of research outcomes.

- DESIAP Mailchimp database of 359 members
- Facebook (facebook.com/desiapnetwork) with 147 followers (as of November 2017)
- Vimeo (vimeo.com/album/4217650)



PROJECTS

We're collating Service Design and Social Innovation projects and case studies from across the Asia-Pacific region. If you have a project or case study you'd like listed feel free to [submit a project](#).



Search

All	Australia	Bangladesh	Cambodia	China
Hong Kong	Indonesia	Japan	Lao PDR	
Malaysia	Myanmar	Nepal	New Zealand	
Philippines	Singapore	Sri Lanka	Thailand	



4.4

Funding Bids

- **Enabling Capabilities Platform in Design and Creative Practice, RMIT University (\$16,000 AUD) in 2017** to continue the DESIAP public event series. This initiative will fund a three-day DESIAP public symposium and workshop in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. (Funded)
- **Australia-ASEAN Council Grant, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) Australia government, (\$50,000 AUD) 2017-2018.** This funding proposes to bring together practitioners and researchers in Australia, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam, broadening the scope and depth of knowledge generation and exchange. (Unfunded)
- **Toyota Foundation International Grant, Japan (\$120,000AUD) 2017-2019** aims to connect social entrepreneurs, venture investors and researchers specifically from Cambodia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Myanmar and Thailand to design mechanisms to document, share and understand the impact of social innovation. This proposal aims to develop alternate social impact evaluation framework through a series of co-design workshops with key participants over two years. (Unfunded)
- **Global Challenge Research Fund, Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) over three years during 2017-2020 (£1.9 mil).** This proposal focuses on addressing one of the UN Sustainable Development Goal of Quality Education. It aims to support organisations to tackle inter-connected poverty-related development challenges in Myanmar, Cambodia, Thailand and Malaysia. The initiative will further explore cultural dimensions of designing with communities, practitioners and researchers in multiple sites in design, education, non-profit and social entrepreneurship to foster diverse, culturally respectful and contextually specific approaches towards life-long sustainable learning capacity across the region. (Unfunded but invited to final interview stage)

5

Towards creating an ecosystem of learning and research in Design and Social Innovation

DESIAP research network and online platform has successfully facilitated knowledge sharing, learning, engaged discussion and collaboration among a geographically dispersed community. We have identified four core groups who have benefited from this work. These are **1)** local change-makers; **2)** third-sector, NGOs and social enterprises; **3)** educational institutions; **4)** designers and practitioners.



*Ni Ni Myint, ActionAid
Myanmar, April 27, 2017*

“It was great meeting and getting to know everyone. I am sure this network will bring a better opportunity for everyone and ways for collaboration... Be our guest whenever you visit Myanmar and feel free to contact us.”

5.1

Local change-makers

All participants who contributed to DESIAP events are embedded within communities, addressing particular issues and concerns of their locality. Taken together, they are all experiencing competing development challenges such as the need for economic livelihoods balanced with environmental sustainability and wellbeing. Building on the impactful work of such participants, we have taken initial steps to learn from their contexts and understand how we could support their work.

“I would like to thank you all for your kind contribution to make the workshop yesterday happen and with fruitfully. I did enjoy this event and happy to be part of this program. ... I would like to thank you very much for sharing me this interesting summary booklet. I am going to read it carefully. Hope to meet you and the other local changes makers in the other countries in the coming months or year.”

– Chay Lo, Teuk Saat 1001, Cambodia, April 27, 2017

“Thank you for organizing the workshop yesterday which created opportunity of meeting and sharing among Myanmar formal academia, CSOs, INGOSs, private sectors and International Organization. It is very cost-efficient ways of learning, sharing and networking. I really appreciate it because I always want to enhance chances to meet and work together with Myanmar formal academia and private sector as member of CSO. I also thank very much to everyone at the workshop for their opened and friendly sharing despite the very limited time of meeting. Let's keep in touch for realizing future works together when we makes steps for positive democratic changes in Myanmar...”

– Myat Thet Thisar, CEO EMREF
Myanmar, April 27th, 2017

*Laura Smitheman, Programs
and Innovation Director
Impact Hub Phnom Penh,
Cambodia, April 26, 2017*

“Thank you DESIAP team and everyone else for a really interesting afternoon of great conversation and new chances for collaboration.”

5.2

Third-sector, NGOs and social enterprises

Our research has identified a real appetite for networked and community-led Design and Social Innovation approaches in Asia-Pacific. This is reflected and promoted through the emergence of social enterprises like Impact Hubs in Yangon (Myanmar), Phnom Penh (Cambodia) and Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia) who we worked with. Impact Hubs are a ‘part innovation lab, part business incubator, and part community center’ that offer their members ‘a unique ecosystem of resources, inspiration, and collaboration opportunities to grow impact’ (from www.impacthub.net). Impact Hubs support a constellation of designers, business entrepreneurs, third-sector organisations and social enterprises in each location to enable sustained social impact.

We also observed that the number of social enterprises is growing in each location. For example, in Cambodia, current reliance on donations and overseas aid is trapping some organisations into short-term cycles of application and delivery, making it challenging to become self-sustaining and plan long-term impacts. Here, social enterprise and entrepreneurship offer potential to create sustainable business models based on generating a revenue stream from day one. The demand for design capabilities is significant because of the current skills gap. We have begun supporting this demand through providing examples and ways to identify and understand what design might mean in diverse contexts.

“...heard fantastic feedback ... [from] some of the participants to the workshop, really exciting stuff! ... Of course we would love to be involved and support your work as much as we can - please count us in and do not hesitate to reach out should be/when needed.”

– Alberto Cremonesi, CEO (Crazilly Entrepreneurially Obsessed) Impact Hub Phnom Penh, Cambodia, April 23, 2017

“It was particularly great meeting some of the younger Cambodians in our session that afternoon – what an inspiring bunch!”

– Brendan Burke, Friends International, Cambodia, May 11, 2017

Miaosen Gong,
School of Design, Jiangnan University,
Wuxi, China, July 17, 2016

“Thank you for your efforts to connect, it was a great learning and exchange experience for me. I am very pleased to act as a bridge to the mainland as part of Asia-Pacific. Hope to see you again!”

5.3

Educational institutions

Our research evidences that Design and Social Innovation (in methods, mindset, frameworks) is not yet taught in educational institutions in many countries across Asia-Pacific. Design in most locations is synonymous with art, crafts and cultural artefacts. Obtaining specialist Design and Social Innovation training overseas is an expensive endeavour and is often challenging to translate learning into local contexts. A way to overcome this gap is to position DESIAP as a regional platform to catalyse and support capacity in the local ecosystem. Documentation and analysis of case studies, which we've commenced, can be seen as one way to create resources for teaching. DESIAP symposia and workshop events have provided opportunities for the participants to consolidate their reflection, articulate learning and showcase their work with an international community of researchers, practitioners, government agencies, and NGOs. In combination, our approach have begun to create spaces, forums, events and platforms to share lessons and stories of successes and failures. This aims to create cultures of trust, openness, collaboration and transparency, which is so central to social innovation. Encouraging openness and making change visible to all is a secure pathway to get there.

“I just wanted to thank you once again for the invite to participate in DESIAP. It has been a fantastic experience on all levels, and I learned a lot and came away feeling really energized! Above all, I am glad that DESIAP gave me the opportunity to work with both of you! I hope we can continue the collaboration through follow-up initiatives such as grant-writing, book project, journal special issues, and/or practitioner playbook development, etc.”

– Shaowen Bardzell, Associate Professor of Informatics,
The Cultural Research in Technology Lab, Indiana
University Bloomington, US, July 15, 2016

“I want to congratulate you for such a successful event, and it gives me hope to see how many people are actually interested in Social Design or design for the good of society. I already shared your DESIAP website link with my students, and hopefully SUTD and NTU could work in some initiatives together...”

– Nancy Takeyama, Nanyang Technological
University, Singapore, February 14th 2015

Hiroshi Tamura, Co-director
of Re:Public Inc. Japan,
February 4, 2015

“It was indeed a great two-days that I could share with you. I really had been inspired while joining in the conference and the workshop. I would heartedly express my gratitude to your offer and kind accept of my participation to the workshop”

5.4

Social innovators, entrepreneurs and designers

Capability-building through research is significant, based upon evidence that many designers and professionals in social innovation are reacting to competing and demanding tasks, making them time-poor and disabling them from critically reflecting and meaningfully learning from what they are doing (Bowen et al. 2014). Schön's principle of reflection-on-practice (1983) highlights the importance of critical evaluation after events have taken place to enable deeper learning. Using a participatory design approach, rich in multi-modal ways of engagement, we have explored various combination of audio-visual, textual and digital formats for documentation. This champions learning from real-world experience and applied approaches to problem-explorations, making this suitable for this constituent.

“Thank you so much for putting it together. I was really quite encouraged by the sharing and loved the people you put together.”

– Tong Yee, Director of The Thought Collective,
Singapore, February 15th 2015

“Thank you everyone for a wonderful experience though very brief for us! Ko Ye just presented at our all-staff meeting about the experience, how he enjoyed sharing and learning about design work across borders. For both of us meeting all of you was a highlight, and we look forward to keeping in touch and perhaps working together in the future!”

– Taiei Harimoto, Proximity Designs,
Myanmar, July 19, 2016

“I didn't meet or see all presentations or talk with everyone but those I did were very inspiring and thoughtful, and I fully support the need to highlight these topics in the broader Singaporean and Asian communities.”

– Brandon Edwards, Executive Creative Director,
frog Singapore, February 18, 2015



Figure A

5.4

Our reach in engaging designers and practitioner have increased through various DESIAP symposium and knowledge exchange workshops. These gathering also cohered existing networks in different countries to enable practice-based learning and knowledge sharing through Design and Social Innovation projects in the region while enabling learning and reflection on practices from wider international examples. The public symposia have created opportunities to connect people from incubators, NGOS, think tanks, innovation hubs, social entrepreneurs, social venture funds, governmental departments and policy-makers to generate or progress potential new ideas.

Evidence of on-going relationships between network members can be seen in new collaborations. For example, Bas and Megan from STBY met Chutika Udomsinn, Thanyaporn Jarukittikun and Jett Virangkabuttra through DESIAP Bangkok 2016 (see Figure A). Since then, they participated in several networking events in Asia, for example, a Service Design Jam in Jakarta (See B, C), and UXHK that brought together service designers/ researchers/UX designers from across Asia (See D).



Figure B



Figure C



Figure D



5.5

Summary

This report captures a snapshot of the activities, discussions and themes that have emerged through the DESIAP platform. In particular, we have reported on the outcomes as a result of the AHRC Research Network fund. The network fund has enabled us to extend and grow the DESIAP network into an eco-system of learning and research in Design and Social Innovation in Asia-Pacific.

6

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